

Baltics to Baghdad

WASHINGTON
From the Baltics to Baghdad, the umbrellas of appeasement are unfurling.

"Lasting change can come to the Soviet Union," said a powerful Voice of America commentary on Feb. 15, "when citizens no longer need to fear massive surveillance — and worse — from the K.G.B. Secret police are also entrenched in other countries, such as China, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Cuba and Albania.

"The rulers of these countries hold power by force and fear," was the accurate message beamed by V.O.A., "not by the consent of the governed. But as East Europeans demonstrated so dramatically in 1989, the tide of history is against such rulers. The 1990's should belong not to the dictators and secret police, but to the people."

These words were labeled a "call to revolution" by Saddam Hussein, dictator of Iraq. He conveyed his displeasure through four cables from our Ambassador in Baghdad to John Kelly, the diplomat who had run the Poindexter "back-channel" arms bribery of Iran, now elevated by President Bush to run the State Department's Near Eastern bureau.

Mr. Kelly joined the King of Saudi Arabia in supporting Saddam's protest and denounced the V.O.A.'s truthful words at a morning meeting on Feb. 17, chaired by Secretary of State Baker. Our pragmatic Secretary told the U.S.I.A. representative at the meeting to bring the V.O.A. editorialists to heel.

The hangman of Baghdad had reason to be edgy. His nuclear missile program was set back by a huge explosion last Aug. 17 that sources tell me may have killed hundreds of technicians at Al Hillah, south of Baghdad. He also may have suspected that his efforts to smuggle nuclear detonators out of the U.S. were imperiled by U.S. Customs agents in California; their trap was sprung this week.

The State Department, which could not have been ignorant of Iraq's attempt to steal our nuclear secrets, has long sought to appease Saddam. Accordingly, the dictator was assured that no more such broadcasts would trouble him, and U.S.I.A. was instructed to clear all editorials — in writing — with State Department censors.

The close supervision was extended to another area: the Baltics. "We were told by U.S.I.A. that State wanted no editorials at all on Lithuania," a Voice employee tells me. (Richard Carlson, the Voice director, loyally insists no new pressure was applied.)

Mr. Bush and Mr. Baker have evi-

dently decided that "peace for our time" would best be achieved by hearing only promises of no use of force from Moscow and by ignoring the pleas for support of a small nation struggling for freedom.

The newly empowered superczar, Mr. Gorbachev, ordered the Red Army to arrest "deserters." We must refuse to accept Moscow's description of these brave young Lithuanians as deserters; on the contrary, they are patriots resisting impressment by a foreign power, in the face of likely beatings, torture and worse.

Mr. Bush, supported by Jimmy Carter and unopposed by Congressional leaders, refuses to assert even moral support of the nonviolent Lithuanians.

Russian tanks and helicopters are roaring through a nation that wants

Silence is also a gamble.

only to be let alone; Moscow is ordering out foreign observers, to prevent pictures of any crackdown. Young Lithuanians are being dragged away by the occupying army — with thousands more to be forcibly conscripted into hated foreign uniforms in coming weeks — and the U.S. Government is worried that any expression of support for the oppressed nation would "inflammate the situation."

Spare us the apologia that nice-guy Mr. Gorbachev is being forced to use force by his mean army leaders and his unruly Baltic subjects. One man has assumed the power to rule by decree, and he has decreed that the Soviet empire will not give up its Stalinist conquests.

We cannot liberate the captive nations by force of arms, but we can take a stand on the principle of self-determination. Would it harm Mr. Bush's quiet diplomacy — his "masterly inactivity" — for him to publicly praise the nonviolent stand of President Landsbergis? Would it really inflame the Kremlin for the American President to use the word "independence" in speaking about the goal of negotiations?

To Moscow and to Vilnius as well as to Baghdad, we should rebroadcast the V.O.A.'s forbidden message: "The 1990's should not belong to the dictators and the secret police, but to the people." □